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By the Book

GREGORY CURTIS' ARTICLE "THE Fourth Tramp" [Behind the Lines, April 1996], about Ray and Mary La Fontaine's witty, original book *Oswald Talked*, does a disservice to the readers of *Texas Monthly*. The La Fontaines' book, in my view, is the most persuasive and professional book on the Kennedy assassination since Gerald Posner's 1993 *Case Closed*.

I confess a professional interest. In 1994 I published a lengthy article by the La Fontaines, titled "The Fourth Tramp," in the *Washington Post's* Outlook section. Along with my fellow editors, I found the story of John Elrod, a short-order cook who spent several hours in the same Dallas County jail cellblock as Lee Harvey Oswald on November 22, 1963, to be an important contribution to the evidentiary record.

Curtis' article did not mention, much less describe or analyze, two thirds of the interesting new evidence that the La Fontaines present.

John Elrod's story strongly suggests that Oswald had knowledge of the activities of a group of Dallas gunrunners. These same weapons traffickers were, according to an FBI report, talking in the fall of 1963 with a group of Miami Cubans about an invasion of Cuba. It was supposed to take place at a specific time: the last week of November 1963. Moreover, the La Fontaines report, these anti-Castro Cubans were funded by the CIA—though agency officials acknowledged privately that they were not under CIA control. And, the La Fontaines note, these Cubans sought to purchase their weapons for this invasion from a Dallas gun dealer who was one of only two gun dealers in the whole area who sold the type of Mannlicher-Carcano bullets that struck President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Might there be a connection between the Cubans' planned invasion and Oswald's actions on November 22, 1963?

Curtis' suggestion that the La Fontaines are just two more Americans driven nuts by their emotional need for conspiracy is unfortunate. One of the greatest pleasures of *Oswald Talked* is its many humorous asides about the soundbells, lunatics, and lost souls obsessed with the Kennedy assassination.

JEFFERSON MORLEY

Washington, D.C. ♦